

## Regional Surveys

### Costa Rica

#### Refugee Demography

There are thought to be 8,000 Salvadorans and Guatemalan refugees in Costa Rica, of which 6,000 are registered with the UNHCR. Only 350 of these are in the camp at Los Angeles . . . which encourages collective participation toward agricultural self-sufficiency organized largely by refugee workers. This camp will hold 1,000 persons when it reaches its capacity later this year. The remainder of refugees in Costa Rica is dispersed in the towns and cities.

In 1981 there was a series of expulsions of Salvadorans caught working illegally. These expulsions were to Nicaragua, the country most refugees passed through on their way to Costa Rica.

#### Voluntary Agencies

The Episcopal Church has started referring small number of Salvadorans and Guatemalans in particular need of resettlement to the Canadian Embassy. Arrangements to supply selected Red Cross personnel (the only other assisting agency) with the guidelines and documents are in process. Discussions were held with ICM for coordination of refugee transportation from the zone to Canada.

#### Canadian Policy

Canada's resettlement role in Costa Rica should be expanded to a limited extent. Salvadoran intellectuals, professionals and others from the urban middle class having no access to assistance in Costa Rica and no hope of local integration, and who have a clear claim to Convention refugee status, could be assisted through resettlement to Canada rather than be exposed to the hardship of enforced idleness or re-migration to another area of first asylum.

#### Nicaragua

Nicaragua is becoming the most favoured destination of new refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala. This impoverished country, itself in the throes of reconstruction, can offer little more than effective reception facilities and a relatively tranquil environment. One small-scale agricultural resettlement project has been launched. Educated people who are not comfortable with Nicaragua as a destination of first asylum tend to try to make their way to Mexico. Immigration personnel do not currently visit Nicaragua and the need for Canadian assistance is probably more emphatic on the aid side rather than on the resettlement side.

#### Guatemala

There are thousands of Salvadorans in

*Many involved in the refugee movement have advocated going beyond band-aid humanitarian approaches to an analysis of the political causes resulting in large outflows of refugees. Meyer Brownstone was invited to comment on the Dawson report. His analysis attacks alleged causes beyond the symptoms. — editor.*

*The Dawson report represents a sympathetic and supportive Canadian position on the question of resettlement of Central American refugees. Its recommendations deserve support. But our understanding of the question and our actions need a far broader view unrestricted by, though including, the narrow mandate of the Department of Employment and Immigration.*

*"It should be noted that Canada is the only major resettlement country now accepting Salvadoran refugees for resettlement."  
Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration Levels, November 1982, p.4.*

Refugees in Central America are first and foremost created by long-lived, indigenous oppression by ruling oligarchies. The oppressed deny their oppression, ultimately with violence. Where they succeed in overcoming their oppression, as in Nicaragua, regional oligarchies engage in counter-revolutionary activities.

To compound the situation, external economic and political forces have historically reinforced the status quo. In Central America a pre-eminent external intervenor is the United States Government and the United States-based corporations. (Canada has done little to moderate this intervention.) The effect of this is to reinforce the indigenous, oligarchic economic political and military power. This, in turn, prolongs and escalates the indigenous struggle, raises the possibility of regional war, and shifts attention from particularly repressive national regimes in the name of regional objectives. This is the expanding foundation for the immense scale of refugee problems in Central America and their unbelievably brutal character. There are refugees inside and outside of El Salvador and

## Refugees in Ce

### The Dawson Report i

by Meyer l

Guatemala. There are now limited but growing numbers of indigenous refugees in Honduras.

The scale is staggering and growing. There are over two million refugees from and in the region as a whole. Being a refugee is bad enough, but for these refugees there has been no end to horror. They were bombed and butchered in their homes and in their communities, attacked en route to escape to recipient countries (thousands died) and in Honduras, a recipient country, violations have not ceased. All refugees are subject to the prison-like quality of camps, to denial of basic normal activities such as work, to constant harassment by Honduran troops. Many have been forcibly relocated in the haste to clear a war zone in the border area. Many refugees and Honduran refugee-workers have been killed. This process has created Honduran refugees in their own country.

When the Dawson report refers to people in peril, then it is difficult to exclude any refugee — all are in peril of one form of extreme limitation of human rights or another, with death as a strong likelihood.

Clearly, the basic United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) objective of protection and security has not been met despite its international stature. It has been in part almost swept aside by the onrushing regional war, by oligarchic and United States policies and actions. No refugee program, outside of wholesale migration from the area, can effectively relieve suffering in the context of a regional war and the context of recipient countries who are themselves grossly under-developed and oligarchy-ridden. Salvadoran and Guatemalan

*In the settlement of Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees "of major importance, of course, if not the decisive factor, has been the cooperation and generosity of the Honduran government, without which thousands of people would no doubt have lost themselves."  
From Refugees, No. 9, Sept./82. Published by UNHCR.*

# Central America

## In a Political Context

Meyer Brownstone

refugees have run from one oligarchy to another. There is limited human survival in either.

The regional refugee program must emphasize security and development in the areas in which refugees are located. The Salvadoran refugees themselves have petitioned the UNHCR to provide a refuge in Costa Rica, Panama and Nicaragua, and indeed, Canada. Their choice must be understood, respected and supported. The likelihood of achieving this petition is limited and every effort must be made to support refugees in Honduras, in Mexico, in El Salvador and in Guatemala. But first, there must be a rejection and denunciation of Ronald Reagan's obscene statements of democratic progress in Central America. He has pronounced this over the bodies of thousands and the bodies of thousands who will be murdered by his forces of democracy. The people and government of Canada cannot remain silent in the face of this grotesque lie.

The major viable, if very fragile, factor in the refugee situation is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. It is essential to focus Canadian efforts on the UNHCR. Canada is a strong supporter of the UNHCR. It sits on the Executive Committee. The UNHCR must fulfill its protection mandate in Honduras, a task which it has not fulfilled in its work in this region partly because of elements of incompetence, of questionable judgments, of succumbing to United States pressure and partly because of its weak status in Honduras. These factors have on occasion resulted in the spectacle of UNHCR officials refusing food and medical supplies and basic protection to refugees who were resisting relocation, and has actually resulted in forced reversal of the flow of refugees back into active war zones. Promises of relocation in rural resettlement schemes in Honduras have a hollow ring. After all, these are the very Salvadorans who were sent back by Honduras to El Salvador in "the football war" of 1969 — conditions are if anything less receptive in Honduras than they were then. But despite the bleakness of this prospect, the UNHCR, together with indigenous and international agencies, can do much to make life more bearable

for the refugees if international influence can cause the Honduran regime to view refugees as refugees, not as security risks, and to abandon its war against them.

The number of refugees the U.S. is proposing to admit for the 1983 fiscal year totals 90,000. This figure includes 15,000 from Eastern Europe, 6,000 from the Near East and South Asia, 64,000 from Indochina, 3,000 from Africa and 2,000 from Latin America.

From *Refugees*, No. 9, Sept./82. Published by UNHCR.

The Dawson report is sympathetic but remains confined to "practical" questions of defining status of refugees, and behaviour of recipient countries (Mexico and the United States). It speaks to the support/rescue of a miniscule portion of the refugees. Canadian perspectives must go far wider in terms of: (1) Canadian resistance to the threat to world peace posed by the oligarchy's intolerable pressure nationally, the oligarchic regional entente, and United States support and intervention on behalf of these regimes and "regional considerations". A continuation of current tendencies can only mean a multiplication of refugees and a compounding of a refugee condition which almost defies amelioration through refugee policies; (2) Canadian direct and personal responses (opening homes to refugees, sponsorship, providing funds) to refugee petitions to be relocated in other countries; (3) material support of refugees inside El Salvador and Guatemala; (4) significant intervention in the UNHCR to increase its protection function capacity in Honduras; (5) rejection of relocation within Honduras without the active participation of the refugees themselves; (6) substantial increase of material support for refugees in Mexico and Honduras coupled with continued strong submissions to the Government of Honduras regarding human rights.

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Guatemala because of its common border with Salvador. Canada has a limited role in Guatemala facilitating family reunification of both Salvadorans and Guatemalans with their dependents from Guatemala. Voluntary group contacts in Guatemala have been able to identify a very small number of refugees who could benefit from resettlement in Canada. A procedural framework has been established in conjunction with the resident Canadian mission to ensure that such cases are referred to the visa office in Mexico City on an ongoing basis.

### Honduras

#### Numbers

The UNHCR and other official sources estimate that the number of refugees in Honduras ranges from 11,000 to 20,000 Salvadorans and 1,000 Guatemalans. The number of Salvadoran refugees entering into Honduras is decreasing.

Complicating the question of refugees from Salvador and Guatemala is a new influx of Mosquito Indians who have arrived recently from Nicaragua, bringing the total to an estimated 10,000.

#### The U.N. Convention

Honduras is not a signatory to the U.N. Convention. Government spokesmen indicated that they respect the Convention insofar as national security allows. There have been a number of independent reports of arrests, expulsions and even assassinations, the trend of which appears to be increasing.

#### Relocation

Although refugees were initially confined in border areas where camps had been developed and a significant amount of de facto local integration had taken place, the authorities did an abrupt turn about late last year and decreed that refugees would be restricted within a zone not less than 30 miles and not more than 50 miles from the frontier. This led to the forced removal of refugees to a rather arid and inhospitable interior plateau where local self-sufficiency cannot be achieved. The main camp at Mesa Grande . . . at best can only be a holding facility pending the development of alternative local integration projects. Rather than accept forced relocation to this area, some of the Salvadoran refugees have voluntarily repatriated themselves or have left for other countries of temporary asylum.

#### Canada's Role

Canada's refugee interests in Honduras are twofold. Firstly, as Honduras has an extensive border with El Salvador, it is essential that the border remain open and that refugees be effectively assisted and protected in Honduras if UNHCR policy for the

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area is to succeed. Secondly, Honduras has proven to be deeply concerned about Salvadoran refugees who, even out of fear for their well-being, have moved outside the zone 50-80 miles from the frontier. It is alleged that any such people are liable to be detained or may be summarily refouled to El Salvador. Canada could resettle some of those persons who will not be accepted by the Honduran government, provided, of course, the individuals concerned aren't statutorily prohibited from coming to Canada. Canadian support for the UNHCR assuming a coordinating role was expressed. In addition a standing offer was made to resettle any Salvadoran detainees who are not welcome in Honduras, provided we can obtain access to them while in detention and they are able to meet admission requirements.

#### The Role of UNHCR

At the time of the team's arrival, international assistance programs to refugees in the border area with El Salvador had fallen below minimum requirements because of a split in the administration of the UNHCR's operating partner, CEDEN. The regional UNHCR representative was in Tegucigalpa to negotiate new arrangements and seek Honduran government agreement for the UNHCR to assume the operational role itself pending the development of other solutions. At the same time, the UNHCR reactivated recommendations to the Honduran authorities to agree to the development of agricultural resettlement projects for Salvadorans as a more humane alternative to Mesa Grande. In the long term these agricultural settlements would become available to poor Hondurans as development projects once the Salvadoran refugee problem is solved. Subsequently, the UNHCR regional representative who was in Honduras

to negotiate on the question of coordination reported that the Honduran authorities, both civilian and military, had agreed to the UNHCR taking over the coordinating role for refugee relief and in addition they would favourably consider the establishment of camps in more favourable areas for agriculture well removed from the frontier area. He indicated that the next problem would be that of obtaining the necessary staff to administer the UNHCR's expanded role in Honduras.<sup>2</sup>

#### Mexico

##### Transit and Refuge

There are three, if not more, aspects to the current refugee situation in Mexico, some of which have implications for Canada. As the land bridge between Central America and the United States, Mexico is a transit country for individuals seeking entry to the U.S.A. Reliable sources estimate that up to 600 Salvadorans and Guatemalans are apprehended each week in Mexico and returned to the Guatemalan border. While many of these people are simply potential illegal entrants to the U.S.A., there are, at the same time, refugees among them. There is no official handover of these people to the Guatemalan authorities at the time of their expulsion from Mexico and no information as to what happens to them.

The second component involves Guatemalans who traditionally have migrated into the Chiappas area in Southern Mexico to harvest the coffee and cotton crops. Since the outbreak of widespread violence in Guatemala directed against the Indian population, the influx of Guatemalans into Chiappas has increased 5-fold and the

<sup>2</sup>As a postscript, it is noteworthy that the UNHCR did assume the co-ordination role in April. Further arrangements for a network of agricultural settlements are now underway.

normal return has not taken place. There may be as many as 200,000 Guatemalans now in the area. *Refoulement*, which took place on a mass scale last fall has now ceased and the establishment of de facto camps is going forward to facilitate assistance.

A third component is the Salvadoran group. Mexico grants de facto refugee status and documents to Salvadorans other than those using Mexico for purposes of entry to the United States. There are no official statistics obtainable on the numbers of documented and undocumented Salvadorans in Mexico but all estimates are well in excess of 100,000.

The group in most apparent need in Mexico consists of urban Salvadorans living illegally in Mexico City who are thought to number 40,000. Being out of status and unable by law to remain in Mexico City, these people cannot obtain legal protection. The UNHCR has unilaterally granted mandates to some 150.

##### The Canadian Embassy

The visa section at the Canadian Embassy in Mexico City has been active in implementing the special programs for Salvadorans which went into effect in March 1981. As of June 1982, 274 Salvadorans with a close Canadian connection had been visaed under relaxed criteria and a further 160 Salvadorans as Convention refugees. Individuals who are Convention refugees are accepted within the Latin American Refugee Programme if they meet the guidelines for our limited resettlement initiative.

The Officer in Charge reported that his office has and would continue to have more work than can be handled in extending a full range of services throughout Central America. Selection visits are infrequently

## Refugees in Central America and Mexico

Countries	Salvadorean Refugees		Other Refugees		Total	
	Assisted	Total	Assisted	Total	Assisted	Total
Belize	2,000	2,000	—	—	2,000	2,000
Costa Rica	8,000	10,000	1,500	5,000	9,500	15,000
Cuba	—	—	—	2,000	—	2,000
Dominican Rep.	—	—	300	5,000	300	5,000
Guatemala	—	70,000	—	—	—	70,000
Honduras	14,910	16,000	12,197	13,000	27,107	29,000
Mexico	3,500	120,000	14,325	20,000	17,825	140,000
Nicaragua	5,326	22,000	50	500	5,376	22,500
Panama	1,000	1,000	200	500	1,200	1,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>34,736</b>	<b>241,000</b>	<b>28,572</b>	<b>46,000</b>	<b>63,308</b>	<b>287,000</b>

(Source) From UNHCR. Figures as of 15 August 1982.

There are a total of 287,000 refugees in Central America and Mexico, according to latest government estimates. Of this total, 63,308 are receiving assistance from UNHCR at the request of host governments. More than half the refugees receiving assistance are from El Salvador. There are also significant numbers of Guatemalans and Nicaraguans, as well as refugees from other Latin American countries. UNHCR provides legal protection, emergency assistance and promotes self-sufficiency projects.

made to Nicaragua or Honduras because of the small number of applications from these areas. El Salvador (and for a temporary period Guatemala)<sup>3</sup> is not visited because of the possible risk to the personal security of any officer sent to that country. Periodic area visits are made to Panama, Costa Rica and Belize as required. Between these visits, part-time immigration services are available in Guatemala and San Jose, Costa Rica through the respective Canadian Embassies under supervision from Mexico City. Communications, however, are not reliable nor is it an easy thing for clients from other countries in the region to obtain permission to enter Mexico for the purpose of consulting with our office there. Delays in executing routine transactions for non-refugee applicants are extensive.

## Belize

One neglected area in the region is Belize, concerning which there is very little hard information. One group of Salvadorans in Belize has recently appealed to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees requesting resettlement in Canada. Simply from the point of view of availability of land in a similar climatic zone, it would seem that Belize is a prime area for resettlement of subsistence farmers from Salvador. If any Canadian involvement is required, it is probably aid rather than resettlement which would be the appropriate vehicle.

## The U.S.A.

### Salvadorans

The issue of Salvadorans and Guatemalans in the U.S.A. is bound up in a long tradition of illegal economic immigration from that area of the southern United States. This flow has increased in intensity since the outbreak of civil unrest in both El Salvador and Guatemala. Estimates of a quarter million or more Salvadorans in the U.S.A. were quoted by several different sources.

The U.S.A. is the only country on the North

American continent which officially reports to El Salvador. Far more significant than deportations is the U.S. program of assisted voluntary departure which has the same effect as deportation in respect of the long-term prohibition against return. Voluntary departure is effected without hearing or appeal.

Among Salvadorans in the U.S.A. there is little spontaneous interest in resettlement in Canada except when the alternative is expulsion from the United States.

### The Canadian Presence

The operation of our programs in the United States or anywhere else must be neutral. Canadian immigration services in the U.S.A. are available to all applicants regardless of their legal status vis à vis U.S. Immigration law. The fact that we interview on occasion in U.S. detention centres is indicative of tacit consent by the U.S. authorities to the operation of Canadian programs as well as to the policy of the U.S. government to allow deportees to proceed to destinations other than the country from which they came or of which they are citizens.

Because our limited program for Latin American refugees focuses on refugees who do not have protection or are likely to be returned, the greatest potential demand exists in the United States. Groups organized to provide legal aid and community services to Salvadorans and Guatemalans in the U.S. are only just becoming aware of the Canadian program and the growth in referrals of cases from these groups is inevitable. The magnitude is difficult to predict at this time because the number of cases they refer to us will depend on the success of other legal remedies.

Groups of volunteers who came out to meet us in Texas and Los Angeles proved to be loose coalitions of church, human rights and ethnic groups. They seem to have emerged onto the scene fairly recently and did not give the appearance of yet having

been able to coordinate respective roles one to another. In some cases, our visit had proven to be the catalyst for them to come together and discuss common problems.

Considerable differences were noted between the situation in Texas as compared to Los Angeles. In Southern California, local groups had succeeded in raising bail bonds for detained Salvadorans. Once released on bail, their priority in the refugee claims procedure drops well down the list. It is unlikely that these claims will be heard in the foreseeable future. This latter group has de facto asylum in the U.S.A. In Texas, on the other hand, bonding has not been readily obtainable with the result that deportation after adjudication of the refugee claim to the U.S. authorities is a more likely eventuality. Referrals from this area will likely be heavier. The capacity of Los Fresnos detention centre is under 250, but the turnover rate is high. As a result, there is potential for significant growth in our program from that area.

It was evident that while good contacts had been made between our Consulates and groups serving Los Fresnos detention centre in Harlingen, Texas and El Centro in California, no contact had yet been made with groups aiding detainees at Laredo and El Paso centres in Texas, the latter of which is the largest centre in the area. Efforts to make our program known to groups in this area are underway.

The Canadian program is necessarily small-scale and therefore applicable to those who are genuine Convention refugees and who fit the profile we have developed to describe those in most need. Media publicity (which had been suggested by some interlocutors) would serve to clog the system with ineligible; would raise false hopes among many and could be construed as criticism of U.S. policy. We also indicated that the place to make a referral was to any of the 11 Canadian Consulates in the U.S.A. with full-time immigration facilities.

## World News

Squadron Leader Prasong Soonsiri, Secretary-General of Thailand's National Security Council, announced that his country would push Indochinese refugees back across its borders unless Western countries honoured pledges to accept them for resettlement.

*The Asia Record*, Vol. 3, No. 7, October 1982.

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ICM (Intergovernmental Committee for Migration) have borrowed a Belgian expert in physical rehabilitation and a Scandinavian expert in social rehabilitation (compliments of the Belgian government and the Danish and Norwegian Refugee Councils) to strengthen

their Medical Services in Southeast Asia to identify and prepare dossiers on physically and mentally disabled refugees so these people may be considered by a country for final resettlement.

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There are 175,000 Indochinese refugees and 200,000 displaced Kampuchians in Thailand. On present estimates, 40,000 are expected to be resettled in 1982. In 1981 the figure was 102,561.

*The Asia Record*, Vol. 3, No. 7, October 1982.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees announced the allocation of an additional US\$2,000,000 from his Emergency Fund for assistance to persons of concern to UNHCR in Lebanon

and Syria. Beneficiaries will include Lebanese displaced persons within Lebanon, as well as Lebanese citizens who find themselves in a refugee-like situation in neighbouring Syria.

This brings the total of UNHCR's assistance to US\$5,540,000.

*UNHCR Press Release REF/1512.*

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According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 11,209 Poles had sought asylum in Austria as of August. Between January and June of 1982, UNHCR reports 9,711 Poles were resettled out of Austria; of those, 3,110 went to the U.S., 2,558 to Australia, and 1,120 to Canada.

*From Refugee Reports*, Nov. 5, 1982.